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COMPASSIONATE.

BY MRS. S. L. CHEESEBROUGH.

The mother died, and the father lifted
His two-year daughter up
To kiss the lips that had been to them
A fountain of love to sup.

The cup was empty, and cold its edge
At mother's sorrowful kiss;
The wonder of that hour bowed it more
Was pain as bitter dim.

The child stooped down for her loving draught
With hungry, trustful heart;
Then, wondering, turned to her father turned:
"If mamma don't kiss her part!"

Strong and warm were the arms that pressed
The stricken child within;
But was the anguish that filled the breast
To drink the quivering chin.

Some cup in every moment dashed
By hands invisible;
So they for the dead unchanged
By the Omniscient will.

We each grieve over our empty cup
With blistering lip and soul;
While some One drinks of our bitter love,
Loves more than the whole.

THE LILY OF ST. ERNE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ESTHER'S HUSBAND," "HELENA LYLE," ETC.

(This story was commenced in No. 4, Vol. 56. Back numbers can always be obtained.)

CHAPTER XXVI.

NO LONGER WELCOME.

They were a very silent trio, Mr. Penruan, Eleanor, and Max, when they met at the breakfast-table on the morning which was to witness Elinor Morison's departure. The Squire was previously troubled at the discovery that his portioned dreams placed him at the mercy of any member of his household who chose to watch over him; and now was unreasonably bitter against his wife for sleeping so soundly that she never missed him from her side.

Eleanor was so busily engaged in reviving some perplexity as her step-father, and was less reticent about it, for when the meal was ended and he rose, gathering up the papers and letters he had scarcely glanced at, she made a gesture to detain him.

"I must ask you a question or two, Mr. Penruan. No, don't go away, Cousin Max; your presence may serve as a reminder that it is worse than folly to lose one's temper."

"If you have anything to say to me, say it quickly and civilly," the Squire told her.

"The presence of my young kinsman may remind you, as you please it, that to the discredit of your manners you own both respect and civility, and, therefore, are not justified in attempting to disguise any of my commands."

"Well, then, sir, as it is evident that you possess no clue whatever to what to speak to you, I will at once inquire whether you purpose carrying out your intentions you expressed last night? Is Esther Morison to leave the Abbey?"

Mr. Penruan lifted his eyebrows.

"Mad curiosity! Did I not tell her so last night? Am I given to saying one thing and meaning another?"

"There are grave—very grave reasons why Morison should remain here," Eleanor persisted. "Do you forget that, sir?"

"There were reasons why I put up with the presence of this woman in my house. But she has always displeased me; there has been covert insolence in her looks——"

"Oh, sir, it will not do for you to watch the looks of those about you too closely!" cried the impetuous Eleanor, who could rarely restrain herself from uttering a stinging retort.

"Covert insolence in her looks!" he repeated; "and little less in her manner! She would have learned me, if she dared, and I hope borne with her too long! Have you any other remarks to make on my domestic affairs, Mrs. Eleanor Haydon? If so, pray don't let any delicacy prevent you from proceeding."

"You spoke strangely just now," she answered. "You corrected my remark that there are reasons why we should retain Morison's services, and signified that they are no longer required. Am I right?"

Mr. Penruan nodded.

"What do you mean, sir? Is there not the same sad cause for her vigilant and affectionate attention that there has been for years?"

And Eleanor's eyes began to question his with much anxiety in them.

"You may think so; I do not," he coolly replied; "for I am of opinion that Mrs. Morison's patient might be in more skillful hands than hers; and therefore, the said patient will be removed as soon as the necessary arrangements have been made."

"You will not be so cruel?" Eleanor began, but he promptly stopped her.

"You had better understand at once, young lady, that nothing your spirit of contradiction, your determined and doubtful opposition to all my plans, may lead you to urge, will have any weight with me! I have resolved to do what I think best, and to do it in such a manner that not even you will have any opening for finding fault with my proceedings!"

"Explain yourself, sir!" she exclaimed.

"To whom? To you? How long have I been under the domination of my ward and step-daughter, that she must be consulted before I lift a finger in my own house? Take care, Miss Eleanor Haydon! As you have insisted that our young friend shall be a witness to your unseemly conduct, I will tell him what, in pity to you, I have hitherto concealed. You have an idiot sister, whose condition you, and one or two as evil-minded as yourself, have attributed to an act of heathenish cruelty committed by me—an accusation as absurd as it is false!"

"You have an idiot sister," he repeated, significantly; "and your own bursts of violence—your wild freaks, especially that of riding a horse as evil-tempered as yourself—must lead any thoughtful person to the conclusion that Violet Dingden

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

is not the only one in the family whose brain is affected. Take care lest for my guardianship a more stringent one should be found advisable for you as well as your sister!"

He quitted the room before she could make any reply; and Eleanor, pale, gasping for breath, caught at the arm of Max, and looked wistfully at him.

"No," she said, recovering herself; "his abominable insinuations have not had any effect upon you! I am sure you will not be so easily induced to believe that an hereditary malady exists in my veins. But others may be more credulous; and that is why, what will become of me? Max Havering, I swear to you by everything I hold sacred that Violet Dingden has just implied is as false as his own heart! No taint of madness is in our family, and he knows it!"

"My dear little cousin, why do you let Mr. Penruan's unfeeling observations agitate you in this manner?" Max remonstrated. "Rest assured that he only talks in this strain to alienate and annoy you. He knows well enough that he could not interfere with your liberty. He may be an autocrat in his own dwelling, but there his power begins and ends. He would not be allowed to smuggle an heiress out of the way, without certain inquiries being made as to the real state of the young lady's intellects."

"Thanks for that reassuring speech," was the more cheerful reply. "I dare say I shall soon overcome the chill his menace has cast over me. But you will say a word about it; only if ever you do hear that the lovely and accomplished step-daughter of Mr. John Penruan has mysteriously disappeared, I hope you will remember who is the person most likely to profit by getting rid of me."

"Pray don't dwell on such a notion. You make me feel quite uncomfortable," said Max. "At what time will you be ready for the sketching excursion we promised ourselves?"

But Eleanor answered, with a sigh, "At no time to-day, good cousin. I have other things to think of than my own amusement. I suppose Mr. Penruan has taken it into his wise head that I have placed unlimited confidence in you, and told you all his secrets, as well as my own; and so, as he has broached the subject, I need no longer attempt to conceal that my sister is in much in need of my pity as my affection. But, perhaps, you have heard the story of this great family affliction from other lips?"

"Not till last night. I could not help knowing that some mystery was connected with the apartments that communicate with the library; but, on my honor, I have not made any deliberate attempts to discover what it was."

"I quite believe you; and you must also believe me when I declare that—let Mr. Penruan say what he will—it was a deed of violence that made my pretty loving little Violet what she is."

"I have heard this also; but pray judge Mr. Penruan as leniently as my informant did. She assured me he was carried away by rage when he struck the poor child, and was most eager to alleviate the sufferings his rash act had caused."

"And yet he would send away the faithful creature who has watched over her ever since the occurrence!" Eleanor reminded the speaker. "And worst—he evidently meditates handing our poor Violet over to the tender mercies of the cold, stern foreigner whom he brought here once before. But this shall not be. The helpless girl shall not be hurried away from her native land, and immured in some private asylum, where she may be treated with the greatest brutality! No, no! I say it shall not be! I will go to mamma, and try to rouse her into opposing it."

"Don't be too hasty!" cried Max, seizing her by the dress, as she was flying past him. "Just ask yourself if it will be right to say anything that may induce Mrs. Penruan to control herself with her husband?"

"Would it be right, think you, to keep silence, and let my own and only sister be yielding as it is, for she has permitted herself to be estranged from the unfortunate child, for whom maternal love might have done so much. Is it not bad enough to know that although she resides beneath the same roof, we never behold her? To know that those nearest and dearest to the afflicted one are never permitted to minister to her wants, nor make the smallest efforts to alleviate the awful affliction that has fallen upon her?"

But Max, remembering the ghastly being he had beheld on the previous evening, shook his head. "Nay, in this matter I must confess I think with Mr. Penruan. Such interviews would be productive of so much pain to you and your mother that he has acted wisely in forbidding them."

"Whenever was John Penruan actuated by such motives as you are ascribing to him?" was Eleanor's bitter comment on his speech. "Painful did you say? Yes, it will be anguish that no words can express when the playfellow of my happy childhood looks at me with vacant eyes; but I must nerve myself to endure this. She shall not be left to the careless hands of indifferent persons!

Max was a little puzzled, and Eleanor hastily added, "You do not understand me; and yet I am only going to do the same as you would, were you in my position. When Morison leaves the Abbey, I shall take her place, and charge myself with the care of my sister!"

"Will Mr. Penruan object——" Max began.

"It shall not ask his permission. When he understands that I am with Violet, he will also comprehend that if she is removed from here, I intend to go with her. For very shame sake he will not venture to rid himself of both of us; and, on the other hand, I shall feel that I am playing into the hands of a gentleman who will take advantage of every false step I make!"

She laid her fingers into the palm of Max, who was in great doubt what to say to her plans.

"Dear cousin, I shall look to you to give me prompt warning, if anything happens that may affect my future. Two short, sharp taps at the door in the library will always bring me there."

"But Captain Reston? What will he say to an arrangement that will entail upon you so much anxiety, and so many unpleasantnesses?"

"He is a soldier!" she answered proudly. "Tell him that I am doing my duty, and he will—say, he always counted. Indeed, my dear cousin, I feel that this may be a fortunate circumstance for both of us. I might have been weak and selfish enough to but for your Charlie with a penniless wife, if I had left him; my honor obligations brought so strongly before me."

But Eleanor's lip quivered as she tried to say this in her gayest tones, and Max still retained the hand she had given him.

"I cannot feel sure that it is your duty to exclude yourself with an unfortunate who is incapable of appreciating your devotion or benefitting by it. Pray take a few hours for consideration."

"Not an hour! not a moment! If I went to mamma, as I proposed doing at first, she would only cry, and declare that no one is so much to be pitied as herself!"

"And is she not greatly to be pitied?"

"Yes. Poor mamma! her case in all the more deplorable because she has not strength and will to help herself or her children. What counsel would she give me if I asked it? Max, Her dread of offending Mr. Penruan would dread her interfering in Violet's behalf, and so she would grow hysterical, and avoid me for upsetting her, until I should leave her, half-angry, half-sorry, as I have often felt before. So say no more. I have an innate conviction that I shall never repent, devoting myself to my poor sister."

Certainly; Max had never thought her so beautiful as when, her eyes glistening through tears, she ran away, to commence her self-imposed task. With his hands thrust into his pocket, he was standing at one of the windows, wondering whether Eleanor would be as disagreeably impressed as he had been with the appearances of her unfortunate relative, when a servant came in to say that Mr. Penruan wished to speak to him, and was awaiting him in the study.

As he crossed the hall, in obedience to this summons, Mrs. Morison came down the principal staircase, in her bonnet and shawl, with a travelling bag in her hand. She stopped short at the sight of Max, and seemed inclined to address him; but when he paused, too, and civilly accosted her, she gave him the curtest of replies, and proceeded him to the study, where Mr. Penruan evidently expected her.

No acknowledgement of her long and faithful services was heard from the lips of the grim Squire. He pushed across the table the little pile of money that was due to her, showed her where to sign her name on the receipt already written, and then, giving her a nod of dismissal, turned to Max as quickly that he did not perceive the look of contempt, tinged with dislike the woman bestowed on him ere she quitted the room.

"If she was not his enemy before, he has made one of her now," thought the more observant Max, and then he sighed regretfully, for, to his warmer heart, there was something pitiful in the way this wealthy man, endowed with so many blessings, contrived to alienate every creature who came near him.

Mr. Penruan fidgeted awhile with some papers; then addressed his young kinsman, with some restraint.

"Am I trespassing on your time? There was some talk, wasn't there, of a trip somewhere?"

"There was; but Miss Haydon is otherwise engaged."

"Hem!" And again Mr. Penruan's hands moved restlessly among his papers. "As you have remained with me instead, my dear Max, I may as well tell you that I am beginning to feel rather uneasy on her account—and yours."

"Speak plainly, Mr. Penruan," said Max, in his blandest manner. "At present, I do not understand you at all."

"Indeed! But you will give credit, I hope, for the kindest motives, in saying what I feel it my bounden duty to say?"

"If you are doing a duty, sir," was the quick reply, "I should be the last man in existence to find fault with you for it."

"Thanks. It is very pleasant to have to deal with a young man who is so thoroughly straightforward as you are—very pleasant! I have no doubt that you will see the justice of my remarks—no doubt whatever!"

As Max did not know what answer to make to this speech, he merely bowed his head, and after a little pause, the Squire proceeded.

"You have never given me your confidence, my young kinsman. I am not going to complain of this, but express how much such reserve towards one who was most willing, most anxious, to befriend you, has pained me; we will let that pass. As I said before, I do not wish to speak of myself."

To what was his harangue tending? Resolved not to speak till he knew, Max still remained mute; and, finding him thus impenetrable, it was in more acrid tones that Mr. Penruan went on.

"You have been domesticated here for some time, Mr. Maximilian Haverying, and the world, always ready to be censorious, is beginning to interest itself in your motives for remaining so long at the Abbey."

"Am I to understand, sir, that I have outstayed my welcome?" the young man demanded haughtily.

"My good Max, did I not tell you that it was not of myself I was talking? Have I not been delighted to have you here? Our subject is Eleanor Haydon. She is generally considered a charming young lady, and when a gentleman takes up his residence beneath the same roof with her—shares her walks and her rides—sings with her—seeks every opportunity of being in her society—the gossips naturally inquire what are this gentleman's intentions?"

"I am not at all inclined to satisfy the gossips," retorted Max; "but if you, sir, put the question to me on your own account, I reply, without hesitation, that I love Eleanor Haydon as if she were my sister."

"You will find it difficult to make others believe that your very marked attentions have been merely brotherly ones," said the Squire, with an unpleasant smile; and his auditor began to feel hot and angry.

"As far as I am concerned, sir, it is of no consequence what indifferent persons may think of my conduct, and it will always be in your power to exonerate me; for you know that it has been by your own pressing invitation that I have remained so long at the Abbey, and you are also aware that I have never entered myself in the list of Miss Haydon's suitors."

"Pray do not add to the awkwardness of my position by giving me such difficult points to answer as those you have enumerated. I cannot enrol myself as your partisan, my young friend, because it is incumbent on me as Eleanor's guardian to tell you that if you mean nothing—absolutely nothing—by your attentions, you really ought not to remain here."

"Then you wish me to bring my visit to a close?"

"I?" and Mr. Penruan put up his hands with a helpless air. "Have I not just told you that my own wishes must be in abeyance? You know how gladly I should have received you as a son-in-law; but if this is not to be, duty, my dear Max, duty compels me to say that Eleanor's interests demand your departure."

Max bit his lip; but he knew that the keen eyes of the Squire were upon him, and he tried hard to repress any other symptoms of annoyance. That Mr. Penruan was so eager to be rid of him as not long since he had been anxious to keep him was evident; and for his own part he would not be sorry to bid adieu to a house that had so many dangerous and disagreeable associations connected with it. But he had learned to distrust his kinsman; to seek for hidden motives to everything he said and did; and the question that now arose was, "Why am I in his way?" Why is he striving to drive me hence in such unaccountable haste?"

For once in his life, the impetuous Max acted with caution, and temporized.

"I could not wish to remain under your roof, Mr. Penruan, if my presence proved injurious to the fair fame of Eleanor Haydon; and I do like Miss Haydon; and I would quit the Abbey within the hour——"

"That will be very sudden," interposed the Squire before he could say another word; "but I honor you for your eagerness to atone for your mistakes, and so I shall not oppose it. I will myself carry your address to Mrs. Penruan, who is not well enough, I fear, to go out this morning."

"I would quit the Abbey within the hour," Max repeated, "if I did not feel that to do so before Captain Reston returns would look as if I were really guilty of some breach of good faith, sir."

"You may trust me to explain everything satisfactorily," the Squire assured him. "If you may safely leave your character in my hand, my dear Max, I will take care that no one shall assail it."

"Thank you," the young man answered coldly; "but I prefer to fight my own battles. Captain Reston will be here in a day or two. When he arrives, I will remove to St. Erne; but quit the neighborhood I will not till I feel sure that both Eleanor and the man who hopes to make her his wife, acquit me of any proceeding of which I have been guilty."

"You look at me, Mr. Max Haverying, as if my plain speaking has offended you," the Squire exclaimed, with a frown. "If you wish to pick a quarrel with me, sir——"

But Max hastily interposed.

"Excuse me, Mr. Penruan; I can have no such intention while I am enjoying your hospitality. I will think over what you have said, and rid you of my presence here as quickly as is compatible with certain obligations I have entered into."

"Shall I be considered too inquisitive if I ask what you mean by certain obligations?" Mr. Penruan inquired, puckering his brows.

"I merely alluded to a promise I gave Captain Reston," said Max, who did not care to tell his curious host that the ardent lover had bound him to watch over Eleanor, till he could return and do so himself.

"Then you leave us—when?" asked the Squire, keeping to the point with a pertinacity that was very galling, and would have driven Max into answering, "This very moment!" if he had not been restrained by the thought of Eleanor. To go away without seeing her—to leave her without a friend here, and therefore quite at the mercy of her unprincipled stepfather—would be as selfish as cruel; and therefore he once again made an effort, and controlled his rising temper.

"Pardon me, Mr. Penruan, if I defer replying to your question until to-morrow. Surely you are not afraid that Miss Haydon's happiness or prospects will suffer by my tarrying here for another four-and-twenty hours, are you?"

"Then to-morrow you bid farewell to Penruan; but not for ever!" Of course, we shall see you when you visit England again," said the Squire, wisely ignoring the query Max had just put to him. "We shall miss you very much, my dear young friend—very much, indeed."

He was beginning to add some flattering remarks, the insincerity of which so disgusted his auditor, that he abruptly brought them to a close by saying that he would not hinder Mr. Penruan any longer, and quitting the room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REAL OR UNREAL.

The wounded pride that Max contrived to keep in abeyance while he was with his churlish host, arose in full force when he was once more alone, and able to think over his annoying speeches. No, not even for Eleanor's sake, much as he liked her, could he stay at the Abbey, after having been so plainly told to go; and with frowning brow and burning cheek, he went to the library to warn her of his intentions.

His tap at the door leading to the suite was quickly answered by Eleanor herself. She had been weeping and had the air of one who had just received some great shock. In fact, she did not at first seem able to comprehend what Max was telling her, so completely had other events overwhelmed her.

"I will see you again presently," she said. "To-morrow we will talk over these things. Just now my mind is so perturbed, that I cannot."

"My dear little one, you do not seem to have understood what I am saying. Unless I can be of any real assistance to you, I shall certainly quit the Abbey at once."

Eleanor put her hands to her forehead.

"Morison gone—you going—and Charlie away! You make me tremble when you remind me how friendless I am."

"Shall I telegraph for Captain Reston? Although I do not know what sentence Mr. Penruan has in hand, I feel with you that he is not to be trusted; and if I leave this house, I shall not go further than St. Erne until you have some one near to whom you can appeal for protection if you should need it."

Eleanor stood looking at him absently for some moments before she made any reply.

"I am bewildered," she said, at last. "Something has—has occurred that I cannot speak of yet; but if you will give me three hours of the closest thought, I hope I shall be able to see my path more clearly. Then, I forget that you are going home at once, Dear friend, do not leave the Abbey yet," she added, entreatingly. "Telegraph to Charlie. He ought to be here; but do not go away yourself until he arrives. In my for two very helpless creatures, promise that you will not."

"It would be hard to refuse a request couched in such terms," said Max, hesitating; "but it is harder to stop beneath the roof of the Klansman who bids me begone in no measured terms."

"If that is your only objection, I can at a word remove it. You are my guest—mine and my poor sister's. Mr. Penruan has no right to the property he holds. He is an impostor, and he knows it."

"Are you so very sure of this, Eleanor? Remember, it is no light charge to bring against the husband of your mother."

"You mean my question me just yes," she answered. "Give me your hand and let me go. You have much to learn, but not from me."

"Lucy—does it concern Lucy?" he demanded, eagerly; but she only shook her head, and repeated the words, "Your promise; give me your promise."

"I will remain here till Captain Reston arrives," he began; and she stayed to hear no more, but, with a hasty nod, retreated, closing and barring the door by which she had entered the library.

Max did not absolutely repeat the pledge he had given, but he found his position more and more intolerable with every passing hour. He was no longer an acceptable guest; and to his fiery spirit this was an ever-present annoyance, not to be chidden off by any of the resources at hand.

He whiled away a portion of the morning fishing, and carried to the cook a basket well filled, that she exclaimed in delight at such an addition to her larder; and then, throwing off his coat, he worked industriously in Eleanor's garden till the first bell rang for dinner, and he knew that he could no longer avoid the presence of his unhappy host.

But Max rose superior to all vexations when he found on his dressing-table a note, signed with the magic name of Lotty. It contained but these words: "At Uncle Dan's this evening;" but they sufficed to render him very happy. He angured all he wished from them; for he knew that Lotty would not have summoned him to the proposed interview at an earlier date than she had previously named, if it were not with the fixed purpose of fulfilling the assurance she had given him at their last meeting. His perturbation was ended; the embarrassment and reticence that had lately hung round him would be satisfactorily accounted for; and if no cloud interposed betwixt him and the felicity of which he dreamed, a few days more would see him speeding back to Americus with his bride.

He went down to dinner in so cheerful a mood, that the Squire surveyed him askance more than once. Mrs. Penruan was unusually lachrymose; and a chance allusion to the absent Eleanor made her sigh and apply her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I am a most unfortunate mother; and yet it is not my fault that things are as they are, though Eleanor talked to me this morning——"

"Like a fool!" snarlingly interposed her husband. "I wish you would use your dinner, and hold your tongue!"

"How can I, sir, Mr. Penruan, when my heart——"

"Will you help Mr. Haverying to that dish beside you?" he demanded, in tones that made her tremble as she obeyed him.

"Has Max told you that he leaves us to-morrow morning?"